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STATE BEGINS CONSTRUCTION ON SILVER LAKE WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS IN WILMINGTON

Despite the wintry weather, construction is in progress on the first of two demonstration projects to reduce stormwater pollution running into Silver Lake in Wilmington. The projects, sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) through a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, will replace stormwater collection and outfall pipes with new “low-impact development” (LID) approaches consisting of porous paving materials and vegetated areas.

“Currently, stormwater flows over paved surfaces, picks up pollutants, and is collected in pipes, which discharge untreated stormwater directly to the lake,” explained Jamie Magaldi, Assistant Superintendent of the Wilmington Department of Public Works, which is partnering with DCR on the project. “This degrades the quality of the lake water. High bacteria counts in the summer sometimes force the Town to close the swimming area to the public.”

Construction of the first project at the Silver Lake beach parking lot began on January 5th. This project will demonstrate three LID techniques, according to Sara Cohen, Project Manager for DCR. First, the parking lot will be repaved with permeable paving materials, which allow stormwater to pass through the surface and a pollutant-filtering base layer to replenish the groundwater. Second, planted gardens or “bioretention areas” will be built around the perimeter and in the center of the parking lot to collect and filter any overflow runoff and improve the lot’s aesthetic value. The third technique involves two planted swales which will be built at either end of the beach to replace piped outfalls. Like the bioretention areas, the soils and plant roots in the swales will filter stormwater before it reaches the lake. An added benefit of the swales is that they will be less attractive to geese than the current grassy areas; geese droppings are suspected to be one source of harmful bacteria in the lake.

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Construction for the second Silver Lake project, which will be situated across the lake from the beach, on Silver Lake Avenue and Dexter Street, will begin in the spring. This project will focus on disconnecting stormwater flow paths from the storm sewer system. “Instead of allowing stormwater to flow directly from roofs and driveways into stormwater pipes, we’re diverting it into new rain gardens and porous parking areas along the roadway edge,” explained Steve Roy of GeoSyntec Consultants, the project’s designer. As in the parking lot, these areas will allow the rain to soak into the ground where it will be filtered by soil and plantings.

Construction of both Silver Lake projects is expected to be completed by Cali Corporation of Natick in time for next summer’s recreation season.

The projects in Wilmington are two of nine demonstration projects aimed at restoring the Ipswich River through a \$1 million EPA Targeted Watershed grant awarded to DCR in 2004. In addition to improving water quality in Silver Lake, the Wilmington projects will help get stormwater back into the ground.

“Changes in flow caused by human activities, like paving over surfaces so stormwater no longer percolates into the groundwater system, have not been a good thing for the Ipswich River,” said DCR Commissioner Stephen H. Burrington. “Between rain storms, it’s the groundwater that feeds the Ipswich River. When the groundwater isn’t replenished, the river dries up, as it did several times this past summer.”

Over the next two years, the U.S. Geological Survey will collect and analyze samples from monitoring wells installed beneath the parking lot and on Silver Lake Avenue. The data will help measure potential reductions in stormwater runoff, and whether surface and groundwater quality have been affected by the LID features.

An informational neighborhood meeting regarding these projects will be held Tuesday, January 24, at 7:00 p.m. at Wilmington Town Hall.

Attached photo: Construction begins on two innovative demonstration projects at Silver Lake in Wilmington. The projects will demonstrate “low-impact development” approaches to managing stormwater.

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